

# COMMUNITY MEDIA REVIEW



## Community Media and Human *Rights*

THE JOURNAL OF THE ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITY MEDIA ■ SPRING 2010

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# Community Media and Human Rights

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## ABOUT THE COVER

Heidi Schumann's stunning photo shows a community in the war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo coming together to watch *On The Frontlines*, which informs local people about the dangers of their children serving as child soldiers. The WITNESS-produced video aims to discourage children's voluntary recruitment into armed militias. To see the video and learn more about it, go to the online version of this issue at [www.communitymediareview.org](http://www.communitymediareview.org).

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Open to anyone interested in citizen journalism as it relates to community media centers.

All lists are archived, and are available in digest as well as real-time formats. To subscribe to these lists, follow the links at <http://lists.alliancecm.org/>

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### In the next Print and Online CMR:

#### "Community Media Centers Connecting to the New Broadband Networks"

We focus on CMCs that are community anchor institutions providing the newest digital media content creation and distribution services to their neighborhoods.

# MILESTONES, TRANSITIONS & OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

■ COMPILED BY ROB McCAUSLAND

We proudly salute significant achievements of PEG access centers and the people who guide, manage, and use them. Please send your news to [rmccausland@alliancecm.org](mailto:rmccausland@alliancecm.org). We will be pleased to include it in future issues!

## MILESTONES

### PEG Center Anniversaries

**30th Anniversary • DECEMBER 2009 •** HomeTowne Television, Summit, New Jersey

**25th Anniversary • NOVEMBER 2009 •** City of Tampa TV, Tampa, Florida

**JANUARY 2010 •** Moon Community Access Television, Moon, Pennsylvania

**FEBRUARY 2010 •** Holliston Cable Access Television, Holliston, Massachusetts

## NEW FACILITIES/SERVICES

**OCTOBER 2009 •** New access corporation began channel operations, Sterling-Lancaster Community Television Corporation, Sterling-Lancaster, Massachusetts

**NOVEMBER 2009 •** Relocated facilities, Middleton Local Cable Access, Middleton, Massachusetts

**JANUARY 2010 •** First public access channel agreed to in Time Warner franchise renewal, Albany, New York

**JANUARY 2010 •** Relocated facilities, Reading Community Television, Reading, Massachusetts

**JANUARY 2010 •** First facility opened, Easton Community Access Television, Easton, Massachusetts

**JANUARY 2010 •** First facility opened, Raynham Cable Access Media, Raynham, Massachusetts

**JANUARY 2010 •** Relocated facilities, Foxboro Community Access, Foxboro, Massachusetts

**JANUARY 2010 •** New access corporation began channel operations, Acton Community Access Television, Acton, Massachusetts

## TRANSITIONS

**OCTOBER 2009 •** Michael Heylin hired as executive director, Raynham Community Access Media, Raynham, Massachusetts

**DECEMBER 2009 •** Keri Stokstad hired as executive director, The Santa Barbara Channels, Santa Barbara, California

**DECEMBER 2009 •** Sarah Hayden hired as executive director, PortMedia, Newburyport, Massachusetts

**DECEMBER 2009 •** Francesca Cerutti-Harris hired as acting executive director, Framingham Public Access Corporation, Framingham, Massachusetts

**DECEMBER 2009 •** Larry DeVencenci hired as interim director, Sierra Nevada Community Access Television, Reno, Nevada

**JANUARY 2010 •** Scott Brown, North Attleboro access producer & Massachusetts state senator, elected to United States Senate

**JANUARY 2010 •** Jason Daniels hired as executive director, Easton Community Access Television, Easton, Massachusetts

**FEBRUARY 2010 •** Stephen Innis hired as executive director, Stoughton Media Access Corporation, Stoughton, Massachusetts ■CMR

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## From the Executive Director's Seat

# Community Media: The Currency of Human Rights

■ BY GREG EPLER WOOD



**The simplest lesson might be this: the more “massive” the media, the more likely it is that the message of human rights will be buried.**

In the struggle for human rights, media have been tools for good and evil throughout modern history. The simplest lesson might be this: the more “massive” the media, the more likely it is that the message of human rights will be buried. Think about it—oppressive governments, fearful of the power of the people, grab control of the mass media, whether it be print, film, radio, or television. But another, more hopeful lesson, is that local community media-makers—often hiding from the authorities and therefore necessarily finding it more difficult to get their messages distributed—seek out truth, expose wrongs, and stir people to become courageous fighters against the status quo.

Not all success stories of small media rise to the status of a David toppling a Goliath, however. They are nonetheless compelling, and should be recognized, honored, and given a chance to inspire us.

Such are the pieces in this *Community Media Review*. If you can extend the lessons learned from the accounts of Sam Gregory, Morgan Currie, Jabari Simama, and others in the following pages to the battle raging right now in the United States over the sustainability of our vitally important local PEG access centers and the open and fair access to our broadband infrastructure, we will have accomplished one of the purposes of this issue.

Our struggle to keep local community alive seems sometimes to be only about the money. Yes, certainly money is key; however, our world includes noncommercial, nonprofit television, radio, web pages, blogs, vlogs, social media, and Internet applications that seem to be able to do ever more with ever less cost. But looks are deceiving. To prevent our world from degrading into a fragmented and diluted

cacophony of competing messages that no one can sort out and “hear,” the real key is to build policies at the federal and state level that maintain and grow our local media into anchor institutions. These institutions, in turn, must be powerful and effective go-to sources for production and distribution of information that can bring us together in a just and democratic world, rather than encourage us to construct walls, silos, and man-caves.

Thank you for reading this issue, and thank you for supporting the Alliance. Although many other nonprofits are struggling to do more with a lot less, we have resolved to do a lot more in the struggle—seemingly against all odds—in the boardrooms of giant media and in the halls of Congress. Do your part by supporting the Alliance, and, in return, your organization will be able to do more for us all.

In Alliance,  
Greg Epler Wood

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**Greg Epler Wood ([greg@alliancecm.org](mailto:greg@alliancecm.org)) consults to community media nonprofits, and has been a member of the Alliance for Community Media for 30 continuous years. Epler Wood has had experience in PEG access corporation startups, executive management, regulation, policy, advocacy, strategic planning, and community needs assessments in Iowa, Vermont, and Washington, DC. He also has had careers in teaching, program development, and management in higher education, and in professional documentary film and TV production. He shares his time—physically and virtually—between his home, family, and clients in Burlington, Vermont, and the Alliance in Washington, DC.**

## From the Board Chair

# Thinking Globally, Working Locally

■ BY DEBRA ROGERS



During the 1993 Alliance for Community Media National Conference in Atlanta, I was fortunate to hear Ambassador Andrew Young speak on his long involvement in the Civil Rights movement, including his relationship with the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. He began, “For we see the public access movement as a continuation of the dream and the vision of the Civil Rights movement, and the human rights movement generally. What we were marching for was to get a hearing. Martin used to always quote Victor Hugo who said that, ‘Violence is the language of the unheard.’ When people explode in violence it is because they have been ignored, because they have been isolated, because they’re frustrated that they have no access....”

That day Young’s words brought forth a rush of emotion for what might have been. I also felt an enormous sense of pride in what we had built in our communities and what together we had built with the Alliance for Community Media.

For those of us living in small suburban communities, community media and human rights may seem as far away as some of the places you will read about in this issue of *CMR*. As I prepared to write this article, I asked myself how the work that goes on at a place like Falmouth Community Television (FCTV) in my own small Cape Cod town impacts human rights.

Then I realized that one of the biggest impacts that we have had in our shared civic life is in the transparency of government, which is a fundamental cornerstone for the provision and protection of human rights. Before FCTV existed, meetings were, indeed, held openly—but few of our citizens attended

or were exposed to the governance process. Instead they would later read encapsulated versions in the newspaper of decisions made and actions taken, with no real means of undoing what had transpired. Now many of those who attend our town meetings declare that their participation was inspired by what they saw on FCTV; they were determined to come to Town Hall and have their voices heard. There is no ignoring these voices, for here they have the access to be heard—not just by governing bodies, but by their neighbors who also become more engaged through this shared avenue of communication.

Moreover, our volunteers are passionate about every aspect of life in our small town. They use community media as a means of expressing themselves and getting the word out, be it about housing, conservation, politics, underserved communities, or the vast array of community issues we face today. What may seem far off is, in fact, alive and well in our communities—large and small.

As you read this issue of *CMR*, I hope you will take a moment to consider the impact you have made in your own community and how we can work together to keep community media strong, funded, and within the reach of all who seek to be heard. I know our work has provided for positive meaningful change in our communities. Together we can help ensure that no voice again goes unheard.

In Alliance,  
Debra Rogers

Debra Rogers (deb@fctv.org) is the chair of the Alliance for Community Media Board of Directors and vice chair of the Northeast Region Board of Directors. Her career in community media spans 28 years, the last 15 as the executive director of Falmouth Community Television in Falmouth, Massachusetts. Rogers is the 2006 recipient of the Alliance for Community Media, Northeast Region Chuck Sherwood Leadership Award, and the 2007 recipient of the National Buske Leadership Award.



From the Guest Editor

# Making the Injustice

■ BY ANDY VALERI

**If human rights are to be truly protected and to flourish, one must provide for a society which functions on democratic principles and accountability, particularly those pertaining to free speech and a free press.**

Communication is arguably the most important process involved in defining our humanity, the way in which we experience the fundamental value and meaning of our own lives and those with whom we share them. Its deprivation, through such means as prolonged solitary confinement, is often considered one of the worst forms of imprisonment and torturous abuse humans can inflict upon their fellow beings. The essential role that communication plays in making us human underlies its internationally recognized status as a fundamental right in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Community media advocates have long been active contributors toward the advancement of human rights, providing people of all socio-economic strata and cultural backgrounds the capabilities and opportunities to participate in the shared dialogue of their society using modern communication technologies. For if human rights are to be truly protected and to flourish, one must provide for a society which functions on democratic principles and accountability, particularly those pertaining to free speech and a free press.

Such efforts to expand democratic access to effective means of communication serve as yet another step forward in what has been an ongoing evolutionary endeavor since the time of the Greeks. Protagoras—the rhetorician of Greek democracy—built a working democracy by teaching the common people how to speak in the agora as equals of the aristocrats. Two millennia later, John Dewey—one of America’s most noted social and educational theorists—insisted that modern democracy

had to be firmly grounded upon the twin pillars of communicated social knowledge and local, neighborly associations. For Dewey, it was through grassroots, participatory communication that people could effectively organize themselves to generate meaningful social change.

Community-based media has been actively expanding democratic access to effective means of communication for decades now, whether the changes being generated entail confronting state violence in Oaxaca or citizens debating zoning ordinances in Massachusetts. This is one of the primary objectives for addressing this topic within the pages (and now web postings) of *Community Media Review*. In the face of the flood of daily tasks and seemingly never-ending policy struggles the access community is consistently challenged with, particularly in the battles over video franchising legislation, we risk losing sight of the deeper purpose of our work and its larger framework. Its importance—not just for our own communities, but for those throughout the world—is illuminated within the articles featured in this issue and by exploring additional resources online at [www.communitymediareview.org](http://www.communitymediareview.org).

It was Gandhi who understood that the key to confronting injustice was not to attack it (and thus risk becoming complicit in it), but to expose it. His entire strategy was based upon the principle that the essential element of nonviolent movements for equality and human rights was to “make the injustice visible.” Media producers have been doing that all over the world since the very advent of accessible modern communication technologies. The empowerment of everyday citizens to docu-



# Visible

ment the conditions of political injustice and social inequalities in which they live allows them to serve as meaningful participants in movements toward effectively responding to and transforming those conditions.

The work of groups such as WITNESS (see p. 12) and the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem ([www.btselem.org/english/Video](http://www.btselem.org/english/Video)) are just some of the examples of citizen-produced media working on the front lines of the struggle for the protection of human rights. B'Tselem, through their "Shooting Back" program, helps defend the rights of Palestinians by arming them with cameras—not with guns and bombs—in order to document the injustices they experience. The Oscar-nominated film *Burma VJ* ([www.burmavjmovie.com](http://www.burmavjmovie.com)), about the courageous work of underground video journalists documenting the violent oppression by the Burmese military government, provides another moving example of the power that grassroots media production can have on political affairs. A similar role has been played by citizen media activists in Iran during the recent government crackdowns there.

Of course, working under the threat of physical danger is not a requirement for involvement in human rights-supporting media. The empowering work of Video Volunteers in the slums of India and Brazil (see p. 20) and the Main Street Project's efforts to ensure universal broadband access to all Americans (see p. 11) are just two of the innumerable diverse initiatives currently under way which lay within the scope of human rights advocacy.

Additionally, understanding grassroots-generated media not just as a tool in the service of human rights, but as a specific

expression of a fundamental human right in and of itself has profound implications for how we approach the ongoing efforts to sustain and expand universal access to its use. For rights-based struggles are not so much about policies, but about principles.

Fighting for the right to do something, and not just the ability to do it, is a more far-reaching and transformative endeavor, the results of which are much more permanently embedded into the social and political fabric of civic society. Those participating in the lunch counter sit-ins during the Civil Rights movement were doing so not because they wanted a sandwich, but rather to assert their very *right* to be there, and to have equal access to the same dignity and opportunity as all citizens. By the same token, do we in the community media movement see our efforts as directed toward providing people access to the *means* of communication, or to the *right* to such access? Understanding the distinction between the two frames has proven an essential factor in the success of the great rights-based movements throughout history.

I hope this issue of *CMR* can help serve to expand our collective field of vision as to the deeper meaning and real-world implications inherent in our work. As the community media movement continues the fight to "keep it local," the real strength of such localism emerges when it keeps us connected through a civic globalism that binds us together through the mutual recognition of universally shared human values. It is our common efforts toward providing for access to communication for all that inalienably unite us together as central participants in the movement for the advancement of human rights. ■*CMR*



Andy Valeri is a longtime veteran of community media, having worked in access television for well over two decades, producing hundreds of hours of programming of various genres, including the television series and online political forum *UnCommon Sense TV Media* ([www.ustvmedia.org](http://www.ustvmedia.org)). He has worked as an activist, local columnist, radio host, and music producer and publisher operating his own record label. Valeri is in an interdisciplinary graduate program at the University of Dayton in Media, Communications and Human Rights. He serves on the *CMR* editorial board. Contact him at [andy@ustvmedia.org](mailto:andy@ustvmedia.org).

# The Human Rights Origin of Community-Based Media

■ BY JABARI SIMAMA

## Editor's Note:

The full-length version of this article is online at [www.communitymediareview.org](http://www.communitymediareview.org)

**D**uring the past 30 years, I have worked in the field of community-based media, focusing on using technologies (including the Internet) to contribute to the ongoing movements for the advancement of human and civil rights. Efforts to provide access to the Internet and cable have borrowed liberally from these movements. My observation that the movements for community-based media and new media technologies share a common bond with the civil rights and human rights movements is shared by human rights, political, and community leaders, including community media activists from organizations like the Alliance for Community Media and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR).

Community-based media are important tools for enhancing education, economic justice, and workforce development—all civil rights issues. For instance, access to community and new media, especially the public Internet, can become a great equalizer by providing healthcare and medical services to underserved urban, rural, and remote areas. Such community-based media works in support of human rights in several other important ways, including:

- providing an outlet for a diversity of voices and a spectrum of ideas that support democracy;
- allowing underserved citizens to be empowered through the attainment of information critical for workforce development, affordable housing, and civic engagement;
- helping entrepreneurs and small businesses reach new markets and contribute to economic development through community-controlled and locally controlled networks;

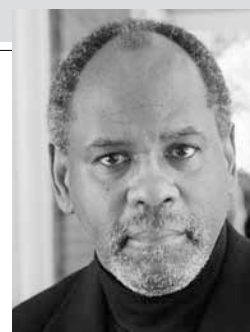
- offering minorities and other underserved communities an opportunity to project images of themselves free of the bias of the mainstream, ad-sponsored media.

In the Spring 1982 edition of *Community Television Review* (CTR; now *Community Media Review*), I advanced the notion that community ownership of minority media was key to the full guarantee of First Amendment freedom ([www.alliancecm.org/cmarchive/CMR-v05n2-Spr\\_1982.pdf](http://www.alliancecm.org/cmarchive/CMR-v05n2-Spr_1982.pdf)). In “Black Participation in Telecommunications: Guidelines for Right Now,” I addressed the question of ownership and freedom:

Black ownership is important...because the dominant mass media have fostered negative images of the black experience and have failed to present the multidimensionality of black life. This has made all the more difficult the development of identity and dignity in the black community. Further, it has hampered the free flow of information which serves as a basis for an appreciation of diversity and a greater understanding of freedom for all Americans. ...Black ownership can be important if it is controlled by and accountable to the black community (p. 16).

This article was written 27 years before the publication of my new book, *Civil Rights to Cyber Rights*. But it is clear from my critique of traditional media and its failure to present the “multidimensionality” of black life that, even then, media technology had the potential to reflect and create bias and to affect how black Americans viewed themselves. A community-controlled and community-owned network,

Jabari Simama, Ph.D., is an award-winning columnist who has written widely on community media, politics, and new media. He is the author of *Civil Rights to Cyber Rights: Broadband and Digital Equality in the Age of Obama* (Community Technology Publications, Atlanta, 2009). He currently is deputy chief operating officer for development in DeKalb County in Atlanta, where he lives with his wife, Nisha.



where self-expression and self-publishing are not only possible but preferable, gives minority communities a fighting chance to define themselves instead of being defined by others.

I had the good fortune of entering the telecommunications field in 1980 when cable television was coming into urban cities in the United States. Passions ran high among racial minorities in America over what cable television might do to help rebuild urban America. We entered the field under the lingering influence of the philosophies of the Civil Rights and black power movements. *Cable Television in the Cities*, edited by Charles Tate, was a bible of sorts to us. Tate stated in his preface:

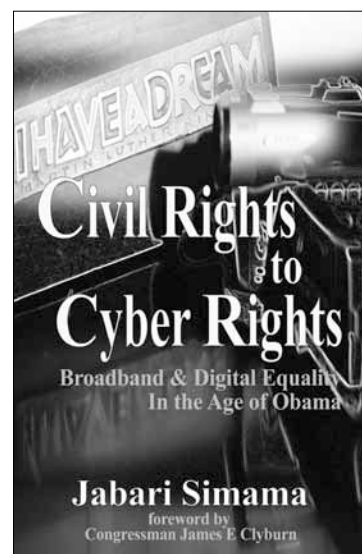
A revolution in electronic communications systems is well under way. It is possible to provide every village, hamlet, neighborhood, community, city, and town with a local, people-oriented television and radio system that is responsive to and reflective of differences in culture, language, history, experience, and race. The means also exist to interconnect these systems nationally and internationally—to establish an effective communications link between people of all nations, races and cultures (p. 3).

While Tate and other authors wrote elegantly about cable ushering in a new multi-racial networked world with implications for ownership, programming, and employment, they reserved their most enthusiastic commentary for community control over cable and community programming. It is clear that Tate saw the potential of telecommunication infrastructure to serve the public interest, the common good. His call for a “people-

oriented” media to serve “every village, hamlet ...community” suggests he saw access to new media as a right and not, as some maintain, a privilege. Tate also foresaw a problem inherent to new media ownership under a pure free market model—monopoly ownership.

One way to ensure that media remain open in the Internet era is to protect the principles of net neutrality. Net neutrality involves keeping the Internet open and not allowing network owners to place restrictions or charges on non-owners who want to distribute content or applications to Internet users. Advocates of net neutrality want to create a clear firewall between those who own networks, such as large telephone and cable companies, and those who want to send content over those networks.

In order to support media democracy both now and in the future, we must ensure that minorities, women, and other disadvantaged groups will continue to have the ability to provide content—whether in the form of cable programming or Internet services. The Obama administration can support this vital human right by keeping public, educational, and governmental (PEG) access viable. Cable and telephone companies have successfully lobbied state legislatures to pass state-wide franchising policies that take away local government’s authority to issue franchise contracts. This same policy limits the amount that cable companies have to contribute to support PEG production and programming. Diversity in programming begins with keeping this medium open and viable. ■CMR



To order copies of *Civil Rights to Cyber Rights: Broadband and Digital Equality in the Age of Obama*, contact Community Technology Publications, P.O. Box 4835, Atlanta, GA 30302 or e-mail [cyberrights@mindspring.com](mailto:cyberrights@mindspring.com).

# Community Access and Human Rights: Next Generation—Broadband Media

■ BY SEAN McLAUGHLIN

*These historic human rights principles are being adopted for the next generation of broadband media access advocacy. Community media organizations are part of this work, helping to develop the policy framework that the United States needed to support sustainable, local, and diverse media access as a basic human right.*

**P**ublic, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) access media emanate from basic human rights such as free expression, free speech, and freedom of information. These fundamental rights are essential components for the foundation of community media and they reflect the global movement's roots and highest ideals.

For perspective, it is important to note that the essential role of media access and community broadband was understood long before the development of cable TV or the Internet!

Back in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included Article 19: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

These historic human rights principles are being adopted for the next generation of broadband media access advocacy. Community media organi-

zations are part of this work, helping to develop the policy framework that the United States needed to support sustainable, local, and diverse media access as a basic human right.

In the fall of 2008, the Media and Democracy Coalition ([www.media-democracy.net](http://www.media-democracy.net)) began convening a series of policy discussions across the country to develop a treatise on the future of the Internet. The first such meeting was convened by the coalition in Denver in conjunction with the Alliance for Community Media's Western States Region conference. Community media providers, including Access Humboldt and Akaku: Maui Community TV, met with legal and policy experts from Washington, DC, to outline Internet and broadband issues of concern for PEG access and related local cable franchise beneficiaries.

Another meeting in the series was convened by the coalition to focus on rural issues. Hosted by the Center for Rural Strategies ([www.ruralstrategies.org](http://www.ruralstrategies.org)), the meeting



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sparked creation of the Rural Internet and Broadband Policy Group. In May 2009, that group published *Rural Broadband Principles and Policy Recommendations* ([www.ruralstrategies.org/rural-broadband-policy-group](http://www.ruralstrategies.org/rural-broadband-policy-group)) which include as the first principle, “Communication as a fundamental human right.” The Rural Policy Group also noted that “Broadband is no longer a luxury but a vital service necessary to fully participate in the nation’s democracy, economy, culture, and society.” Further, “Absentee-ownership of broadband infrastructure and service has failed to serve rural communities. ...Local ownership of broadband infrastructure and service can address problems ignored by absentee-owners such as lack of broadband access, slow speeds, limited (if any) provider choice, open access, training and adoption of technology, data collection, and aggregation of demand.”

Specific needs identified for rural broadband include: locally-owned infrastructure; assistance in technology adoption; accurate data on service availability and adoption; and uniform and transparent federal policies.

Placing the basic human rights principles at the center of the case for rural communities, those core values found substantial common ground

with every “least served” population, including native, minority, disabled, and others. By the middle of 2009, the historic human rights principles of Article 19 were actively shared by diverse constituencies and solidifying across the coalition.

Participants led by Main Street Project ([www.mainstreetproject.org](http://www.mainstreetproject.org)), Media Mobilizing Project ([www.mediamobilizing.org](http://www.mediamobilizing.org)) and Access Humboldt ([www.accesshumboldt.net](http://www.accesshumboldt.net)) created a document to help advance the human rights policy framework. The document opened with: “Any discussion of broadband and Internet policy should begin here: Communication is an essential human need and a fundamental human right” (<http://bit.ly/broadbandpolicy>). A Spanish-language version was also published by Main Street Project and widely distributed (<http://bit.ly/bbpolicyespanol>).

These public policy framing efforts contributed substantially to *A Public Interest Internet Agenda*, which was released by the Media and Democracy Coalition nationally on One Web Day 2009 in Washington, DC, on September 22 ([www.mediademocracy.net/internetagenda](http://www.mediademocracy.net/internetagenda)). The agenda contains specific policy recommendations that bridge com-

mon concerns among diverse constituencies. The proposed policies promote core principles that include broadband communications as a fundamental right. Specific recommendations address: expanding the concept of universal service; securing network neutrality; guaranteeing nondiscriminatory open access; ensuring adequate symmetric broadband speeds; applying similar standards to wireless mobile services; allowing consumers their choice of any device, application, or service; transparency in regulation of data sharing arrangements; and protecting personal communications privacy.

In sum, the agenda calls for “universal access to an open nondiscriminatory network that is of high quality, abundant, and allows for mobility, while protecting the individual’s right to privacy.”

Local, state, tribal, and national public policy leaders are pulling together to support the bold vision of *A Public Interest Internet Agenda*. Readers are encouraged to review the agenda at [www.mediademocracy.net/internetagenda](http://www.mediademocracy.net/internetagenda). Then, tell your elected and appointed representatives that you support public interest policies that protect your communication rights. ■CMR

# Empowering Human Rights Through Video

## An Interview with Sam Gregory of WITNESS

■ BY ANDY VALERI

WITNESS is a groundbreaking organization using video training and technology to open the eyes of the world to human rights violations. WITNESS empowers people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change.



Sam Gregory is the program director at WITNESS. He is a video producer, trainer, and human rights advocate. In 2005, he was the lead editor on *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism* (Pluto Press). In 2007, he developed the WITNESS Video Advocacy Institute, an intensive two-week training program. He has worked extensively with grassroots human rights activists in Latin America and Asia, particularly Burma.

Here, in an interview with *CMR* Guest Editor Andy Valeri, Gregory discusses the importance of the work done by WITNESS, from its day-to-day efforts in the defense of human rights on the ground to its broader role in the expanding movement for establishing fundamental communication rights among all people.

### **Just how important is the use of mediated communication as a tool for the advancement of human rights and social justice?**

Mediated communication functions as a tool for information sharing and, more importantly, organizing and connecting between groups with shared interests or a common problem, whether that be laterally or vertically in a country, or across national borders. So they are critical instruments for human rights campaigns, which rely on effective documentation and the mobilization of people within and across borders.

When WITNESS was created in 1992, following the Rodney King incident in the United States, the idea was very of the moment—drawing on the potential of the increasingly popular consumer handycam to document abuses. Yet, in retrospect, it's clear how preliminary that moment was. Now, aided by the spread in low-cost, high-quality technologies, video and moving image media are becoming increasingly ubiquitous and multi-form (even though a considerable digital divide exists in terms of access, literacy, and skills both within and between societies across

the globe). To us—based on our conversations with both international and local human rights defenders—it is clear that video will soon be discussed as part of every communications and advocacy strategy. This is because video production and distribution is emphatically no longer the exclusive realm of the professional: We have widespread tools to *film* present in tools that four billion people carry with them on a regular basis, i.e. the cell-phone; and dramatically increased capacities to *share* media via [a multitude] of cheap formats.

Increasing moving image creation, usage, and literacy also defines much of the experience of a connected younger generation, particularly in the Global North and within certain sectors of Global South society. Consequently, use of video—including, particularly, mobile video—has publicized and documented many emerging human rights struggles from Rangoon to Oakland to Tehran. Use of video characterizes many vibrant citizen media spaces that fill niches long ignored or abandoned by the mainstream media. Video is the “tool of choice” for many human rights struggles.



**How does the role of organizations such as WITNESS and the kind of work you do advocate for the establishment of communication as a fundamental human right in and of itself?**

In order to guarantee other rights, communication rights are key. To know their rights and understand them, to communicate and organize around them, and to hold people in power accountable, people need the ability to access and share information.

Almost all the situations in which WITNESS is operating with grassroots partners are at heart about how information, crafted into narratives, is deployed to secure attention and redress for rights issues. Typically these very issues have been neglected, ignored, or misframed by those in power and with better access to communication tools, to the detriment of victims, survivors, and affected communities.

A first step in securing such redress is clear information-sharing and solutions-proposing, both within affected communities and with others who have the responsibility or agency to secure change. This could be communities in urban and rural Cambodia facing

forced eviction like our work with partner LICADHO (<http://hub.witness.org/en/users/licadho>). It could be sex workers in Macedonia confronting police misconduct and abuse, as with our recent partner HOPS (Healthy Options Project Skopje; <http://hub.witness.org/HOPS>). Or it could be people in the U.S., led by our partner the National Council on Aging, pushing against hidden patterns of elder abuse ([www.elderjusticenow.org](http://www.elderjusticenow.org)). In some cases, an information gap exists—so the sex workers in Macedonia have never had the opportunity to directly communicate their experiences to police officers with whom they have a conflicted and complicated relationship. In other cases, it's a question of information being used to engage and mobilize a community to understand better their own dilemmas. For example, local human rights group Ajedi-Ka is engaging villagers in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo around preventing the voluntary recruitment of child soldiers in their communities by using video (see *On the Frontlines* at <http://hub.witness.org/Lubanga-trial>).



**We live in a visual age where images seem to have more power and currency than the written word. How do you see the work of WITNESS in relation to this transition in the processes of global communication, and what effects do you see it having on the development in the course of your work and the work of human rights?**

We are definitely in the midst of a moment of tremendous growth in visual media production at all levels of society, circulating both offline, mobile-to-mobile, and online. This content is most visible online, where a growing abundance of peer-produced content “for the good” is circulating across social networks, video-sharing sites, and blogs. Notably, however, much information is difficult to navigate or impossible to absorb, and it is unclear whom to trust.

Also, despite this proliferation of new spaces for communication and exponential growth in content, human rights spaces and advocacy approaches—formal and informal, new and old, virtual and physical—are nowhere near the saturation point of effectiveness in using moving images for change. An increase in media literacy, access to and creation of video is not matched by a “literacy” in strategic use of video for change (what WITNESS has popularized as “video advocacy”). This is particularly true in terms of creating, sharing, and viewing targeted, timely, compelling video that provides the impetus and the opportunity to act.

Strategic, directed, impact-driven use of video remains underutilized as an intervention by either NGOs or citizen networks in spaces including treaty monitoring systems, legislative debates, lobbying of decision-makers, and community organizing. Many human rights actors do not yet have the skills, connections, or experience to organize or coordinate others’ audiovisual media, including citizen media content in spaces like YouTube or the Hub. This is in order to create their own targeted advocacy media for specific audiences, collaborate to develop compelling material with professional or citizen storytellers, link their strategic use of video to new technologies that enhance creation, distribution, and debate, and increase diversity of content and range of modes of circulation to secure concrete impacts in crowded information environments.

**How do you envision expanding the distribution and exposure of your content and that with a similar rights-based focus?**

Our focus has often been on strategic distribution of video content rather than broader exposure of the material for a general audience. We view this as particularly important in an area of growing information glut, where, as Susan Sontag said in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, “Image-glut keeps attention light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content. Image-flow precludes a privileged image.”

With many rights issues, a mass audience or mainstream space may never be the audience that is going to engage and take action on the issues, either domestically in their home country or internationally. With our Hub website, however, we have tried to highlight key examples of human rights media successfully being used to create change. Based on the lessons learned from the Hub, we are now also actively engaged in thinking about how to push some of these human rights values into mainstream video spaces online in a way that motivates people to action, but in a way that does not needlessly endanger the people

*continued on page 16*





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## RESOURCES

### WITNESS

80 Hanson Place  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
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E-mail: [witness@witness.org](mailto:witness@witness.org)

### Hub/WITNESS blog on human rights video

<http://hub.witness.org/blog>  
<http://blog.witness.org>

### Hub 2 Years Review

<http://hub.witness.org/en/HUB2Years>

### Video Action Plan

[www.witness.org/videoactionplan](http://www.witness.org/videoactionplan)

### Video for Change

(book available in English, Spanish, French, Russian online)  
[www.witness.org/videoforchange](http://www.witness.org/videoforchange)

### Video Advocacy Institute Curriculum

[www.witness.org/vai](http://www.witness.org/vai)

### Guides to Video Advocacy

(five-minute animations reinforcing key principles of effective video advocacy)  
<http://hub.witness.org/en/action/vastt>

filmed or those who speak out. This involves engaging the stakeholders around the ethical issues of ubiquitous cameras in situations of human rights violations. For an introduction to some of the questions we are posing, check out our presentation at Cameras Everywhere (<http://hub.witness.org/cameraseverywhere>).

### **To what do you attribute the effectiveness of your video training programs, and how can that effectiveness be replicated or expanded through partnerships with other groups or institutions doing citizen media training?**

We've looked to develop a wide range of training approaches and methodologies to fit a range of potential scenarios and depth of engagement with different actors. For example, we have ongoing training relationships—focused as much on strategy and advocacy distribution as on direct production—with individual partner human rights organizations at a grassroots level around the world. We work on those relationships based around a template Video Action Plan developed in partnership with an organization.

For more light-touch collaborations, and as tools that could be used by other training institutions, as well as self-directed learning, we developed our book *Video for Change* and five-minute animations reinforcing key principles of effective video advocacy—our “Guides to Video Advocacy.” We also developed a two-week intensive Video Advocacy Institute curriculum.

On the Hub, we've focused one of our strands of coverage on highlighting key examples of successful use of video for change, as well as key ethical dilemmas that rights advocates deploying these new technologies may face. Among my favorite posts are the “Top 10 Editor's Picks” (<http://hub.witness.org/en/HUB2Years-EditorsPicks>) and “Iran Protests: A Woman Dies on Camera—to post or not to post?” (<http://hub.witness.org/en/node/13606>).

Over the coming year, we're also looking to expand our training programs in a new direction: developing an online video action strategy toolkit that will enable self-directed learning that leads to a concrete and usable work product in a campaign. Also—reflecting just such trends as you mention toward increasing numbers of groups, collectives, and institutions providing citizen media training—we're focusing on how we could provide additional training and support on advocacy-focused media usage to other training groups, as well as utilize our online spaces to share best practices and training approaches that work.

### **You state there is an overwhelming demand for training in the use of video for human rights and social justice advocacy. Do you see ways other institutions, such as public access facilities and community media centers, as well as communication programs in schools and colleges, potentially serve as partners in helping to fulfill that need?**

We absolutely see the future of training in video advocacy being its mainstreaming into

the spaces where current and future advocates congregate and learn. Many of our materials are intended to be adaptable for these programs. We've also explored how we could develop scalable modules to use in practitioner training for both communication faculties and public policy faculties.

Essentially, WITNESS coordinates its work through four programmatic initiatives:

1) Via our campaign partnerships with individual groups, as well as networks of human rights organizations/groups, working with them to integrate video into strategic advocacy on a range of human rights issues globally. This has included—for example—work supporting legislation to protect elder rights in the U.S., pushing for effective regional action on politically-motivated violence against women in Zimbabwe, and addressing forced

evictions in Cambodia.

2) By providing training in using video for advocacy, including online toolkits and training videos/guides (see p. 16), and encouraging knowledge-sharing of best practices in using video for change, particularly via our WITNESS/Hub blog.

3) Through contributing to building a stronger human rights video for change movement by engaging in research and advocacy to policymakers, other human rights organizations, funders, and technology providers—for example, around addressing human rights safety, security, and consent issues present in online human rights video; and

4) In maintaining an archive of over 3,000 hours of human rights footage, primarily from our partner organizations worldwide. ■CMR



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# Effective Strategies for Using Video in Human Rights Advocacy

■ *Editor's Note: The following is a condensed overview of a list of effective video strategies from WITNESS. For the complete text, see the online version of this article at [www.communitymediareview.org](http://www.communitymediareview.org).*

**T**he key to an effective video advocacy strategy is to have a clear sense of your goals and audience, and to choose the most appropriate strategy for your needs. Some approaches reach wide audiences and help to raise general awareness about a particular issue, but the videos may not be seen by key decision-makers. Some strategies will reach policymakers or judges, but will require additional efforts to reach a broader public. In all cases, do not necessarily assume that the best audience for your video will be the largest—in some cases, it may make sense to target a smaller or more important audience, and ensure that the video you produce is persuasive. *Please keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list and is only intended to be a sample of options, and that these strategies are not mutually exclusive. WITNESS partners often repurpose material to reach multiple audiences. WITNESS can share examples of partners' successful uses of these strategies if you contact us at [witness@witness.org](mailto:witness@witness.org).*

Many of the most successful campaigns incorporating video advocacy rely on multiple formats and audiences. Consider how you might use different video strategies in sequence, so the impact of one action builds on another. For example, coordinate the release of your material to television to build and increase pressure

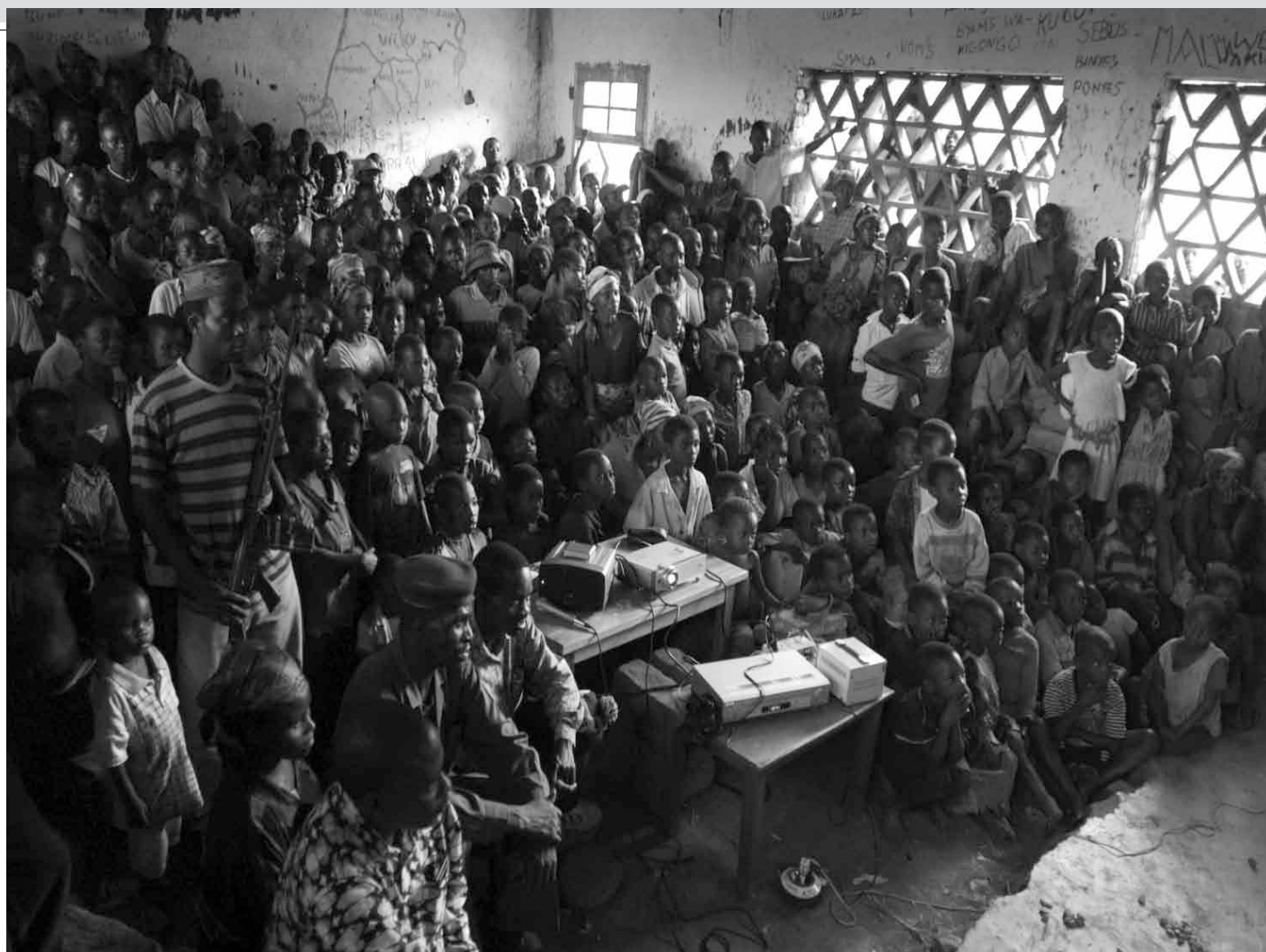


after you have had the opportunity to engage grassroots networks via screenings, and to show the video and/or present your report in private meetings with decision-makers. The WITNESS book *Video for Change* ([www.witness.org/videoforchange](http://www.witness.org/videoforchange)) addresses many of these approaches in more detail.

Key strategies for effective video advocacy include:

- Video evidence before a national court, regional body, or international tribunal. Your unedited or edited footage can be used as a source of evidence in a court of law.
- Submitting video reports before a UN treaty body, Special Rapporteur, or Working Group. Video reports for the UN or other inter-governmental bodies can be structured in different ways: as a documentary on the particular issue being addressed; as a complement to a shadow report submitted to a UN treaty oversight committee; as direct, unedited testimonials by victims of a violation; as raw unedited footage of an actual violation or event.
- Presenting focused, action-oriented video to government, corporate, or civil society decision-makers. Remember that—in some cases—reaching a key government committee or NGO or business decision-maker may be critical to your advocacy.
- Using video as a grassroots education and mobilizing tool for communities, and as an organizing tool for solidarity groups supporting your work. Many video formats can fit this advocacy purpose with an appropriate distribution network and screening materials, such as information packets, handbooks, or manuals.
- Video-blogging to build supporter engagement in a campaign. By using online video sharing sites like the Hub (<http://hub.witness.org>), provided your constituencies have Internet access, you can maintain and build supporter engagement and participation in a campaign by sharing regular video progress reports or short stories.
- Online video advocacy on sites including the Hub, YouTube,





A local community in the Democratic Republic of the Congo gathers to watch *On the Frontlines*, a WITNESS-produced video discouraging the recruitment of child soldiers. (Photo by Heidi Schumann; provided courtesy of WITNESS.)

and social networks. By creating and sharing short video clips, you can create flexible, accessible tools for advocacy that your supporters can use online for e-advocacy and offline for screenings.

- Producing a video public service announcement. A short 30- to 90-second message can be an effective tool in your campaign to mobilize a broad audience around an issue.
- Producing a video documentary to reach a broader public. Documentary storytelling can be an effective way of educating a wide international and domestic public via broadcast and public screenings.

- Video as source for news broadcast, and as an archive for b-roll. Your high quality unedited footage of a violation can, at times, be the only source of news or recording available to a larger public, or it can provide a unique, otherwise inaccessible story.
- Video as a deterrent to further abuse. In some cases, using a video camera as a monitor can help deter human rights violations. WITNESS works with its partners to help assess the risks and benefits of using video in different circumstances. ■CMR

**Documentary storytelling can be an effective way of educating a wide international and domestic public via broadcast and public screenings.**

# Video Volunteers: Visionary Models for Community Media

■ BY MORGAN CURRIE

*Video Volunteers' staff of professional filmmakers use experimental—but highly effective—methods to transform resource-poor people in India and Brazil into full-time, paid community media producers.*

In early 2009, I moved to India for three months to intern for Video Volunteers (VV). I was stationed in the main office in Goa, where VV's staff of professional filmmakers use experimental—but highly effective—methods to transform resource-poor people in India and Brazil into full-time, paid community media producers. VV's network of community producers include tribals (forest people) living far from urban centers, village Dalits (formerly known as "Untouchables") who experience crippling social and economic discrimination, and the urban marginalized classes of São Paulo, Mumbai, and Gujarat, eking it out in precarious *bastis* or *favelas*.

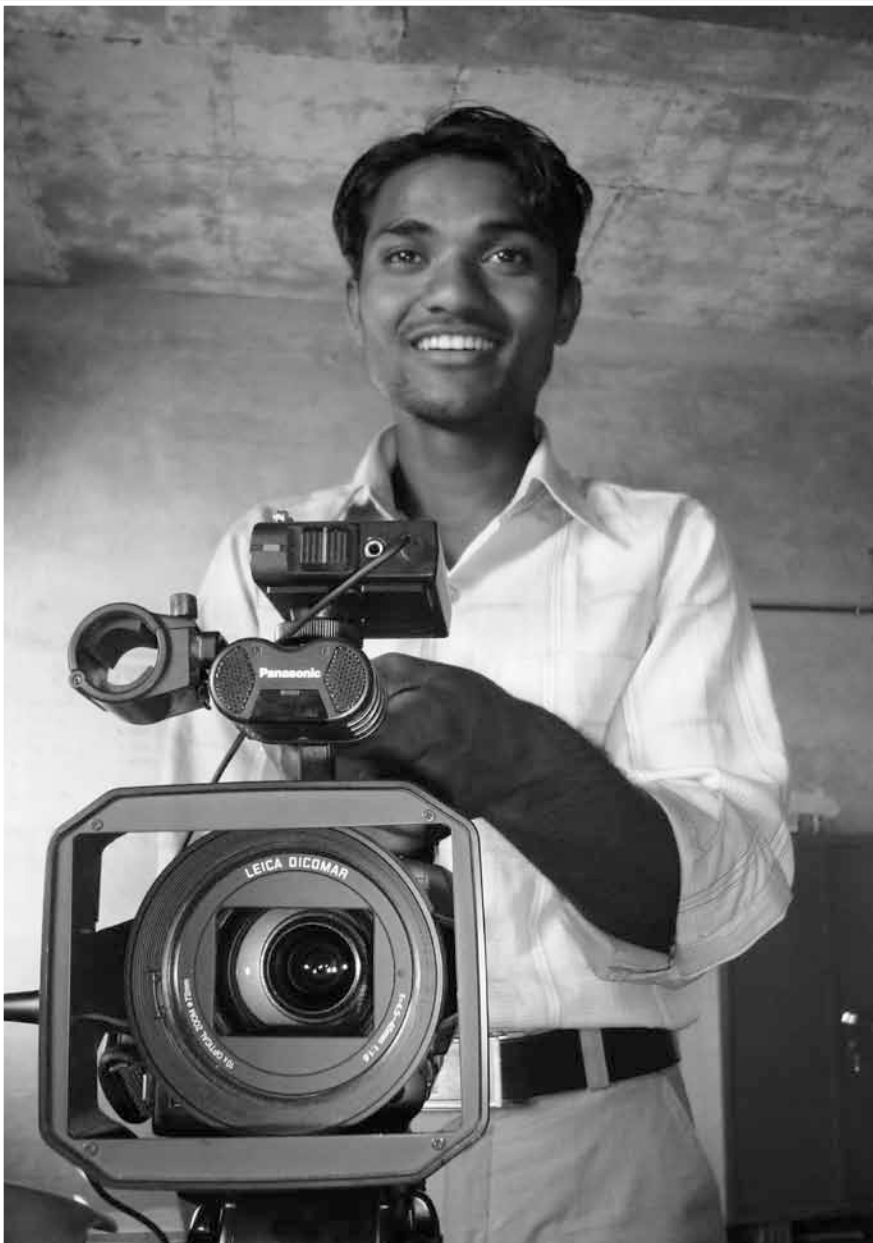
Jessica Mayberry founded Video Volunteers in India in 2003 as an experiment to train citizen journalists from underserved communities in both technical and creative skills. She and VV's co-director Stalin K, a community radio activist and filmmaker, hatched the concept of an experimental community video model called the Community Video Unit (CVU). The CVU was devised as a way to put media into the hands of India's most underserved sectors and to keep it there—a permanent community resource in a country that has no history of cable access or community-produced television.

Here's how the CVU works: each unit is comprised of teams of 10–12 producers trained in technical and editorial skills by VV staff and is aligned with a prominent local NGO that collaborates with VV to provide information on community needs and supply part of its funding. CVU producers learn to write, shoot, and edit 30-minute video magazines about community issues: women's empowerment, Dalit rights, slum infrastructure, health, housing, and land rights. CVUs then exhibit the video magazine several times a month at roving nighttime outdoor screenings that they advertise through word of mouth.

Audiences, many who have never stepped inside a movie theater, can see themselves and their neighborhoods for the first time on screen. Importantly, the videos emphasize action around an issue or a campaign—get tested, protest a corrupt official, call this number if your trash isn't being removed. The videos are the equivalent of neighborhood watch blogs, but for audiences who are often illiterate and have no other form of local news.

I was fortunate enough to visit three CVUs in Gujarat and Maharashtra, including the Samvad CVU, a team of five producers in Ahmedabad. Comprised of Muslims and Hindus, Samvad is a rare site of collaboration between religious groups that often do not mix. Because of local tension, the team creates videos about religious solidarity. They've also provoked raids on kerosene ration stores after exposing corrupt shop owners. The Samvad team works in the Guptanagar slum in a modest two-room office with two computers, two cameras, audio gear, a projection system, several hard drives, and two TVs. While I was there, the office hummed as producers left in teams of two with their cameras for interviews or jumped into rickshaws with projection gear for screenings. Their cell phones rang constantly. One producer, Sofiya, sat at a computer editing a video to the *Slumdog Millionaire* theme song.

Samvad's work demonstrates how VV's community producers must be equally skilled in activism and production. As a proxy press, CVUs spread information about important services: laws legislating land rights, numbers to call to report domestic abuse, and places to recycle trash. They hold officials accountable, as when Samvad exposed corrupt kerosene shops, or CVU Apna Malak Ma reported on fluorosis—the toxic effects of excess fluoride in local water. CVUs play the watchdog role that the traditional press should play, but too often do not. On a more subtle level,



Photos provided courtesy of  
Video Volunteers







Photos provided courtesy of Video Volunteers

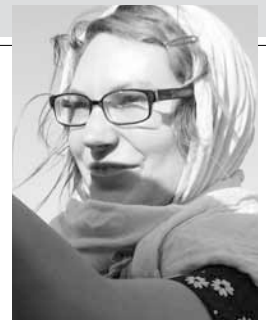
the videos' subversive representations can disturb deeply entrenched social hierarchies. A woman's frank account of domestic violence, for instance, challenges widespread gender discrimination that normally goes unspoken.

In the villages of Gujarat, Apna Malak Ma's all-Dalit producers report they can now enter temples formerly off-limits to so-called Untouchables; their skills as producers give them new standing and access. Other CVUs tell how the female producers' appearance at the evening screenings defies traditional roles relegating women to the house after nightfall, enabling other women to envision expanded female roles in society. Over time, the producers themselves report that they have become informed, politicized community leaders, leading rallies and local campaigns to fight programs such as water privatization and caste discrimination.

There are now thirteen Community Video Units scattered across slums and villages in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, and some are starting to bring in revenue independently. Samvad, for instance, derives 50 percent of its funds from community



Morgan Currie is an American writer and documentary and experimental filmmaker. She is currently working on a Masters in New Media at the University of Amsterdam.



workshops, wedding videos, and productions for other NGOs and commercial TV. It is a testament to VV's success that the first batch of CVUs are still operational, getting better at their work, offering an entertaining information service that their communities now expect, and even proving financially sustainable.

Armed with proof that their producers can make a livelihood in video production, VV launched VCU.br, a program that selects ten graduates of Brazilian *favela* media programs and trains them over a course of a year in video production and distribution. The idea is that community video can be an entrepreneurial venture, enabling *favela* citizens to monetize their skills for the commercial market, local NGOs, live events, or even the local news.

To celebrate these successes, VV organized its first-ever Media Activist Camp in August 2009, inviting its vast

network of Indian community producers—some of whom had never traveled on a train before—to converge in Goa. The producers were joined by international media students, journalists, researchers, and NGOs for a week of workshops on blogging, online advocacy, animation, community feature films, and community video policy, as well as singing, playing music, dancing, and performing skits that went late into the night. The camp celebrated the exceptional levels of technical achievement by producers who were formerly media illiterate. It also heralded the impacts their videos have on communities—both the local audiences who receive meaningful, life-altering messages, and the global alliances of actors who find strength in joining together to fight discrimination and promote human dignity worldwide.

For more information, visit Video Volunteers at [www.videovolunteers.org](http://www.videovolunteers.org). ■CMR

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C O L L E G E C H I C A G O

# The Importance of Community Access in Human Rights Struggles

■ BY GREG BOOZELL

Communication technologies change with a dizzying pace, offering consumers seemingly limitless channels of news and information. Ironically, however, the constricted range of permissible debate within commercial media in the United States seems to remain constant. While commercial media outlets continue to multiply the ways they deliver news to us, the framing of that content is as narrow as it has ever been.

Typically this manifests itself in two ways: important stories or ideas are often either ignored or misconstrued. The causes are both market-driven and ideological. In order to win market share, video news channels and websites have adopted a *People* magazine approach to storytelling, offering news in short, easily viewed segments which demand limited time or thought on the part of the viewer. The constraints of this form are obvious, but suffice to say, it severely limits what be said and how a story can be told.

The ideological pressures are often intertwined with the market considerations. Many authors, including Ben Bagdikian, Noam Chomsky, and Robert McChesney have addressed this issue at length. The key point is that while we tend to believe that media plays a vital role in holding those in political power accountable, too often media, government, and the corporate sector work in concert. For instance, former Bush Press Secretary Scott McClellan referred to the media as “complicit enablers” in the run-up to the disastrous Iraq war.

Within that framework, the need for community media is very clear. In order for democracy to flourish and for human rights

to be respected, media must be free of market distortions and ideological constraints. Media created independent of the demands of the market and free from government interference expand the range of stories that can be told—as well as who can tell them. To that end, community media centers play a vital role.

The role of the media in U.S. colonial conquests provides an important example of both media whitewash and neglect. Media barons William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer are often credited with leading the U.S. into the Spanish-American War of 1898. Their newspapers, the *New York Journal* and the *New York World*, respectively, agitated for U.S. military intervention to win Cuba’s independence from Spain. As it turned out, the U.S. military invasion was anything but

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From *Dissent Is Not A Crime* (2007)

**Although now designated as a “commonwealth,” Puerto Rico continues to be subject to the control of the U.S. government and its people are denied the right of self-determination. However, U.S. colonial rule also includes a long history of resistance and struggle for independence by many Puerto Rican people.**

altruistic. By the time a peace treaty was signed, Spain had ceded colonial control of Cuba, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico to the United States.

Today many Americans are surprised to learn that Puerto Rico remains a U.S. colony. Although now designated as a “commonwealth,” Puerto Rico continues to be subject to the control of the U.S. government and its people are denied the right of self-determination. However, U.S. colonial rule also includes a long history of resistance and struggle for independence by many Puerto Rican people. That struggle has resulted in the arrest and long imprisonments of a number of Puerto Rican activists, not for their actions, but for their political stances.

The National Boricua Human Rights Network (NBHRN; [www.boricuahumanrights.org](http://www.boricuahumanrights.org)) is a Chicago-based organization composed of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and their supporters. NBHRN educates and mobilizes the Puerto Rican community, the broader Latin American community, and other people of conscience regarding issues of justice, peace, and human rights. NBHRN has utilized Chicago Access Network Television (CAN TV; [www.cantv.org](http://www.cantv.org)) for a number of years to work toward that end.

A key goal of the NBHRN is to secure the release of the remaining Puerto Rican political prisoners. In the early 1980s, more than a dozen Puerto Rican activists were convicted of seditious conspiracy to overthrow the lawful authority of the United States government in Puerto Rico. Defined as a “thought crime” by University of Illinois international law professor Francis Boyle, the federal charge has been used almost exclusively against Puerto Ricans by the U.S. government. The charge requires

a relatively low threshold of proof and carries extremely harsh prison sentences if alleged conspirators are found guilty.

While 11 Puerto Rican nationalists were granted clemency by President Clinton in 1999, two remain behind bars today. The NBHRN uses CAN TV’s services to raise public awareness of the remaining political prisoners in hopes of winning their release. In 2007, a 7-minute video, *Dissent Is Not A Crime* ([www.blip.tv/dashboard/episode/2731090](http://www.blip.tv/dashboard/episode/2731090)), was produced in collaboration with NBHRN. In addition to telecasts on CAN TV, DVDs of the video are used as part of public education presentations. Further, since the video was first posted at Google Video, *Dissent Is Not A Crime* has been viewed over 4,000 times. Currently, work on a longer-form piece is under way. ■CMR



Greg Boozell is a videomaker and technology director at Chicago Access Network Television (CAN TV). Check out his media blog at <http://makebettermedia.blogspot.com>. He is also producing a documentary project on the Illinois mine wars in the 1930s. For more information, see [www.minewar.org](http://www.minewar.org).



# “The People Who Have the Problems Are the Ones Who Have the Answers”

■ BY NEENAH ELLIS

**Independent radio stations around the world are telling local stories and sharing national and global news.**

**F**ifty-two years ago, a thin, weak, radio signal was born on the campus of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Students brought WYSO into the world, because they wanted their own voices to be heard. Today that radio signal is robust and its power has been boosted. A million people live inside the broadcast area—we reach into the Dayton market now—and we still give voice to the community.

Students were the core of early WYSO staff: making news and music programs, recording speeches and concerts, making documentaries. They lugged tape recorders everywhere and made programs on every imaginable subject, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

WYSO was a true community radio station then, as volunteers far outnumbered staff. By many accounts, it was an energizing, empowering experience to work there, with great freedom of expression and sense of ownership. For WYSO listeners, it was unforgettable—they had never heard radio like that.

Fast-forward more than half a century. WYSO is still a beloved community resource, now with nine full-time staff and twenty on-air volunteers. Today, none of the volunteers are students. Antioch College fell on hard times and there have been no students on campus since June 2008.

We have an unusual mix of local and national programs. The volunteers mostly make music shows, but we have two essayists, two film experts, and one poet and book reviewer. However, no volunteers are making documentaries to tell community stories anymore.

We want to bring that back.

When I was hired as WYSO general manager a year ago, I promised to support the volunteers and to bring more community voices to the station. I had spent 30 years as a radio producer in Washington, DC, first at NPR and then as a freelancer. I have seen the power of radio made by volunteers around the world.

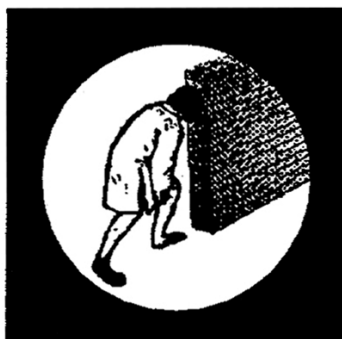
In 1993, I visited Sarajevo during the siege, helping the volunteers at Radio Zid, a station with a mission: to break down the walls (“zid” means

wall) of ethnic hatred and nationalistic politics that had taken over the city. Sarajevo was shelled daily by Serb military forces occupying the surrounding mountains. Sniper fire echoed through the streets. People were starving. There was no running water, no gas, no electricity.

But the radio station had electricity (there was support from the Soros Foundation). Every day people showed up to make media—college students and university professors (classes were suspended), professionals, and off-duty Bosnian soldiers. They made news programs in the morning, played rock and roll at midday. Around three o'clock, two women and a gaggle of kids produced a children's show. At night, you'd hear political commentary and talk shows. People risked their lives to make these programs. It sustained them, gave them a voice, and offered a chance to serve their beloved city in a time of fear and chaos.

Forty years ago, a fellow named Bill Siemering wrote the mission statement for National Public Radio, where I worked for ten years in the late 1970s and 1980s. Today Siemering runs Developing Radio Partners (DRP; [www.developingradiopartners.org](http://www.developingradiopartners.org)) to support community radio stations in the Third World. Last fall, DRP held a journalism workshop for three radio stations in Zambia and

## RADIO



**ZID SARAJEVO  
FM 89.9 MHz**



Neenah Ellis (nellis@wyso.org), general manager of WYSO in Yellow Springs, Ohio, is a documentary producer and the author of *If I Live to be 100: Lessons from the Centenarians*. She was a founding producer of *HearNow* in Washington, DC, which presents the work of radio producers from around the world at public listening events, and is the recipient of three Peabody Awards.

Malawi to learn about natural resource issues and how to report on them. The workshop was held at Radio Mudzi Wathu, which means “Radio in our Village.” The station, Siemerling writes, “has 54 radio listening clubs and in addition to health and other development information, records local musicians. It took some of the workshop participants 12 hours to travel there.”

In the former Soviet Union, for decades, the media was controlled by the state. Today, the Foundation for Independent Broadcasting ([www.fnr.ru/eng/index.shtml](http://www.fnr.ru/eng/index.shtml)) is working to develop independent radio stations around the country. Check out [www.podstantsiya.ru](http://www.podstantsiya.ru), an audio/podcast portal where Russian radio producers are working out the kinks in community radio.

WYSO’s role is hard to compare to wartime Radio Zid, or the nascent operations at Radio Mudzi Wathu or Podstantsiya. Here in southwest Ohio, however, we have a dreadful economic situation. The Dayton area has had thirteen consecutive years of increasing unemployment. And so, in these times, there is good reason to put community voices on the air, because the hard work of rebuilding the local economy will—and should—happen from the ground up.

Twenty years ago I met Myles Horton, cofounder of the Highlander Folk School, where many leaders of the Civil Rights movement were trained in community organizing. “The people who have the problems are the ones who have the answers,” he said.

I would add to that wise sentiment, let’s hear them work out these problems on the radio.

In Wilmington, Ohio, just south of Yellow Springs, ten thousand people lost their jobs when DHL collapsed in 2008. Food banks are flourishing. In the last year, though, 16 young people have returned to Wilmington, some as VISTA workers. Others have created Energize Clinton County to rebuild and diversify the local economy. They have come to WYSO and asked for help documenting their efforts. Why wouldn’t we put them—and others like them—on the radio?

Conventional wisdom says that we should make the radio station more “professional,” but in the 30 years since public radio has gone from rag-tag to respectable, maybe something has been lost: a street-wise, rough-around-the-edges reality, an authentic sound from listeners—not just journalism professionals. And I say that having proudly worked at NPR in Washington.

Community media stations like WYSO are uniquely poised to do this work, so we are optimistic. We know that our future depends on our ability to be of service—to offer imaginative and useful programs about the problems and the dreams of our community, to tell our own stories in our own voices.

Stay tuned. ■CMR

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